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RETHINKING THE BASIC IDEAS AND ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE NATURE, FUNCTION AND RESULTS OF CHILD-REARING PRACTICES

by

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The fundamental question concerning the idéology of families is expressed in terms of expectations. What are the expectations of child-rearing processes in different cultural environments?

It is an assumption that faulty expectations may lead to dissonance and conflict between attutudes and behaviors. One approach to reconciling this dissonance is to change attitudes so that they conform to actual behavior. An alternative approach would be to change behavior patterns -- bringing them into line with attutudes concerning roles and relationships that may be more beneficial to a given cultural situation or environment.

Child-rearing usually (although not always) results in the formation of family relationships. Whiting and Whiting (1975:p. 71) state that it is true that the methods of socialization adopted by different cultures prepare the childrer for the adult roles that they must assume when they grow up.

According to Rubin (1976:p. 116), once marriage is conceived of as more than an economic arrangement -- that is, as one in which the emotional needs of the individual are attended to and met -- the role segregation and consequent widely divergent socialization patterns that result in adult men and women become clearly dysfunctional in the Western culture. Men and women in

the Western culture, are products of a process that trains them to relate to only one side of themselves -- she, to the passive, tender, intuitive, verbal, emotional side; he, to the active, tough, logical, nonverbal, unemotional one. Each honestly believes what the culture has taught them. To be rational is the more desired state; it is good , sane, strong and adult. To be emotional is the less desired state; it is bad, weak and childlike.

This equation of emotional with non-rational, this inability to apprehend the logic of emotions lies at the root of much of the discontent between the sexes (Rubin, 1976:p. 117).

Rural Ireland provides a tragic example of familial relationships that have resulted in a symbolic separation of the sexes -- and quite often contributed to the ethic of celibacy that has had an adverse effect on the marriage and birth rates of that small country (Scheper-Hughes, 1979:pp. 106 and 112).

Child-rearing practices in rural Ireland reflect (1) a preferential treatment of sons. They are punished less harshly, (2) less cooperation is demanded and (3) fewer chores are required (Scheper-Hughes, 1979:p. 170). In the Irish culture, boys are traditionally more valued than girls. It is popularly assumed that daughters will grow up into the "traitors" who will leave their family and marry into an "enemy camp" (the patrilineal residence). On the other hand, sons assure the continuity of family name, lands and ancestral stock. By the age of puberty, village girls have learned the womanly acts of child-

tending, housekeeping, and bread making as well as the social graces necessary for mixing with strangers, neighbors, clergy and shopkeepers. By contrast, adolescent boys have had only sporadic contact with the agricultural and herding work of their fathers -- and little introduction to the wider adult male social spheres of pub, cattle market, and fireside visits' (Scheper-Hughes, 1979:pp. 169 - 171).

In the Irish kinship and marriage system, women occupy an interstitial position, standing halfway between two male lines -- father's and husband's -- and never fully incorporated into either. This situation has tended to result in some women being uncommitted to the well-being and economics of a household in which they have little at stake (Scheper-Hughes, 1979:p. 102). Wit. the passage of each year, young persons tend to grow apart and to develop closer ties with their own sex (Scheper-Hughes, 1979:p. 108).

In the tribal culture of the Mundurucu of Brazil, early child-care is characterized by open, free and unrestricted treatment - particularly with respect to feeding. This appears to be conducive to the formation of warm, outgoing, generous and dependent personalities (Murphy and Murphy, 1974:p. 168). However, the Mundurucu child-rearing practice is also characterized by abruptness - particularly with respect to weening. Usually a child continues to suckle the breast until immediately before a new sibling is born. The Mundurucu mother makes little attempt to prepare a child for the birth of a new

infant. Upon the birth of a new baby, the older child is told bluntly and directly, that the breast is for the new baby. This bluntness is sometimes accompanied by physically shoving the older child away if he seeks to nurse. The older child reacts by emotional squalls, temper tantrums, continual crying, moodiness, and acute manifestations of sibling rivalry (Murphy and Murphy, 1974).

A Mundurucu mother devotes much of her time and affection to infants, and, when a baby is born, her attention is immediately transferred to it -- to the loss of her older children. From being the center of the maternal universe, the child is instantly put on its periphery, and career of childhood is in part a history of coping with this problem. This pattern is characteristic of many primitive societies. Mundurucu mythology is rife with themes of fraternal conflict -- mythological scenes that would be unimaginably horrible in real life (Murphy and Murphy, 1974:p. 168).

The Mundurucu had a history of warfare -- being noted as the fiercest of all the tribes in the Central Amazon region. Their enemies included every other group save the neighboring Apiaca, who were subservient to the Mundurucu and sometimes joined their war parties (Murphy and Murphy, 1974:pp. 79 - 80).

Whiting and Whiting (1975) conducted a psycho-cultural analysis of six (6) cultures in an attempt to establish a scientific basis for predicting the behavior of preadolescent children.

The formulation of the hypothesis for this project was guided by a set of underlying assumptions about the direction of causation in social change. According to Whiting and Whiting (1975:pp. 3 - 4), causation in social change can be expressed in a hueristic model that begins with the environment and history and ends with religion and ideology. In their study, they considered only that part of the model which takes the maintenance systems of a culture as a starting point. These systems include subsistence patterns, means of production, division of labor, social structure, settlement patterns, and systems of defense, law and social control. The maintenance systems are assumed to determine to a large extent the learning environment in which the child grows up. Whiting and Whiting (1975:p. 4) maintain that the learning environment that consists of playspace, playmates, caretakers, teachers, the tasks that he is assigned, the workload of his mother, and his opportunity to interact with his father are the factors that have the strongest influence upon the social behavior of the child.

In being primarily concerned with social interaction, the Whiting and Whiting study (1975) focused upon transcultural behavior categories that were defined as follows --

1. NURTURANCE: In the presence of knowledge that someone else is in a state of need or drive, nurturance consists of tendencies to try to alleviate this state in another person. The empirical categories most closely corresponding to nurturance are (1) offers help and (2) offers support.

2. SUCCORANCE: In the presence of a drive which could be reduced either by the nurturant response of

another person, or in some other way (e.g., by self-reliant behavior, cooperative interaction as equals, dominance, aggression), succorance consists of tendencies to await the nurturant response of another, or signal to another the wish for nurturance. The empirical categories most closely corresponding to succorance are (1) seeks help and (2) seeks attention.

3. SOCIABILITY: In the presence or prospective presence of other people, especially of other people who are making a friendly approach, sociability consists of tendencies to make a friendly response, to engage in activities together, and to cooperate for the sake of social interaction. Sociability is defined to include behavior toward persons of a superior or inferior status, needy or resourceful, providing that the behavior itself involves reciprocity as equals.

4. DOMINANCE: In a relation with another person or group, dominance consists of tendencies to demand that the other person act in certain ways, to attempt direction of the other person's responses without making formal demands, to enforce demands, or to attain a social position which will increase facilities for enforcing demands. The distinction is made between "egoistic" and "pro-social" dominance.

5. AGGRESSION: "Opportunity Aggression" is defined as behavior carried out purely for the sake of hurting someone; "Instrumental Aggression" is defined as behavior carried out to achieve some end.

6. RESPONSIBILITY: In any situation in which performance of a task is required, expected, or preferred as a part of one's social role, responsibility consists of tendencies to perform the task.

7. SELF-RELIANCE: Defined as tendencies toward self-initiation of response sequences and toward maximum reliance upon one's own responses in reaching the goal.

8. OBEDIENCE: Defined as compliance or non-compliance with specific acts that are suggested or demanded.

(Whiting and Whiting, 1975:pp. 58-63)

The Whiting and Whiting study (1975) revealed that the social behavior of the children of each of the six (6) cultures studied was compatible with adult role requirements. Offering help and support is required of adults living in simpler societies, where the meeting of kin-based obligations and reciprocity with neighbors is essential; boasting and egoistic dominance are out place in these societies. In more complex communities, where relatives and neighbors are seen as competitors rather than persons to be helped and supported, boasting and egoistic dominance are often more appropriate responses than offering help and support (Whiting and Whiting, 1975:p. 178).

The head of a corporated patrilineal extended family must be able to exercise authority over his adult sons and their families. To do this he must not be timid about expressing aggression, and the skill learned in reprimanding younger siblings during childhood will stand him in good stead. The conflicting interests of multiple generations living in one household make informal and intimate relationships difficult. The independent nuclear family, in which a husband and wife live together with their children, requires a much less authoritarian structure; an intimate and casual relationship is expressed by parents sleeping and eating together without other adults at the table or in the bedroom (Whiting and Whiting, 1975:p. 178).

In all cases studied, the evidence suggests that whether a child is told to take care of younger siblings or is sent to school has a more profound effect upon the profile of the child's

social behavior than the manipulation of reinforcement schedules by the parents (Whiting and Whiting, 1975:p. 180).

Whiting and Whiting (1975:p. 185) found that in each culture studied, the children were unique in some respects but indistinguishable in others. Differences in learning environments produce differences in children's social behavior; despite this all children seek help and attemtion from adults and offer help and support to infants.

The findings of the Whiting and Whiting study (1975:pp. 9-10) are supported by previous cross-cultural research as follows: (1) Children raised in polygynous household, or households where the men do not sleep with their wives, have little contact with their fathers during the first two years of life -- perceive their mother as the controller of resources, and identify with her. If they live in a society with strong patrilineal bias and male dominance, as young boys they will be in conflict over the sex identity and will be more aggressive in expressing their "protest masculinity". In contrast, in monogamous nuclear families, where the father is intimately involved in the domestic life, young boys will identify with their fathers at an early age and have less need to be aggressive (Burton and Whiting, 1961; Whiting, 1965), (2) Children raised in households in which the mother has few economic or ceremonial duties will not be subjected to socialization pressures at such a young age as those growing up in a household where the mother has many such duties. It was predicted that the former group as

adults would be more trusting of others and more sociable (Whiting, et al., 1966), (3) children raised in extended families or in families which included two adult females would be treated with more indulgence in infancy (Murdock and Whiting, 1951), (4) children brought up in societies with property such as livestock and surplus produce would be expected to be more obedient and more resporsible than children raised in societies with low accumulation of property (Barry, Child, and Bacon, 1959), and (5) children raised in extended family households would be more severely punished for aggression than children raised in monogamous nuclear families (Whiting, et al., 1966).

The question of deviance (as an adult) in terms of homosexuality is not easily resolved. Newton (1979:p. 21-23) reports that her informants emphasized that the "gay life", as a mode of existence, was a "walk of life"; that one is not a "homosexual" but that one "lives homosexuality". Obviously the psychic structure of the "gay" has been altered -- producing specialized organization of social roles and self-regarding attitudes. The gay deviant is a person whose life and identity are organized around the facts of deviance. Homosexual communities are an entirely urban and suburban phenomena. They depend on the anonymity and segmentation of metropolitan life.

Newton (1979:p. 14) also reports that anarchy and violence are part of the way of street impersonator groups. Appointments are routinely broken, plans are rarely made for more than a day in advance, long-term goals and commitments of any kind are

avoided and physical violence is common place.

A common homosexual assertion (Newton, 1979:p. 2) is that homosexuals are actually more masculine than heterosexuals because the latter are woman-controlled or contaminated and because it is more masculine to dominate another man than to dominate a woman.

Evidently male and female role models have played an important part in pre-disposing an individual to a homosexual way of life for Newton (1979:p. 52) reports that one of her informants insists that if he had the relevant information he would be able to tell in any given case, especially with beginning drag queens, which female relative they were patterning themselves after.

In questioning the role of the socialization (or child-rearing) process as the determinant of adult and cultural characteristics, psychological anthropologists have come to see the individual as subject to continual biological and environmental changes and hence to subsequent personality adjustments and to external adaptations to new roles. The experience of early childhood is now generally accepted as one important and fundamental stage among many stages of personality development and growth (Scheper-Hughes, 1979:p. 134).

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